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ABSTRACT

One of a series of pamphlets about the American Revolution in Georgia, this document examines the role of James Wright as British governor in the colony, and his viewpoints about revolution from 1765-1775. The pamphlet can be used as supplementary reading or as a one-week unit for junior or senior high school students. A brief teacher's guide is included. Wright, a conservative, believed in a structured society, in the benefits of alliance with the British Empire to the colonies, and in slow orderly change. Throughout his governorship he endeavored to promote peace with the Indians and to attract increased population in order to grow more agricultural products and to defend the frontier. He engineered two successful land cessions from the Indians and strove to keep settlers from encroaching on Indian-owned land. He himself invested in Georgia property and owned large plantations. Early in his term, he won colonists' respect by debating political issues in private conversation and through leading councilors rather than through public argument. However, when Britain began levying taxes upon the colonies, Wright upheld British authority and enforced the new laws. As opposition grew in the colonial representative government, Wright was forced to dissolve the rebelling political groups. However, as other colonies asserted rights for provincial congresses, Wright's authority in Georgia was overpowered. He ultimately retired in England and tried to obtain financial compensation for his losses. The teacher's guide presents activities, discussion questions, and a crossword puzzle based on the text. (Author/AV)

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Governor James Wright in Georgia 1760·1782

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Editors' Note:

One of the early concerns of the Georgia Commission for the National Bicentennial Celebration was the lack of material on Revolutionary Georgia available for use in the state's public schools during the bicentennial years. As a result, one of the first projects of the Commission was the preparation of a series of pamphlets on the American Revolution in Georgia aimed specifically at public school use. With the cooperation of the Georgia Department of Education, this project has become a reality. Thirteen pamphlets are scheduled to be published between 1974 and 1978.

Our purpose in publishing these pamphlets is to present a clear, concise picture of Georgia's history during these important days. We hope that our efforts will encourage students' interest and add to their knowledge of Georgia's activities during the American Revolution.

Kenneth Coleman
Milton Ready

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Courtesy, Georgia Archives

Many Georgians know James Edward Oglethorpe founded the colony in 1733, but few know much about James Wright, the most important leader of the late colonial period. There are perhaps two reasons for this. Foundings are unique and often come in for fuller consideration than later events. More fundamental though is the fact that James Wright was loyal to Britain in the American Revolution.

Tories were unpopular and largely ignored in America for a century and a half. Only since the mid-twentieth century have historians objectively assessed Wright's contributions to Georgia's colonial development. Such was the price for picking the "wrong" side for many Tories of the Revolutionary era. This booklet will show what James Wright did for Georgia as governor, give his viewpoints about revolution from 1765 to 1775, and make an overall assessment of his place in Georgia's history.

James Wright was a different kind of person from James Oglethorpe in personality and in the type of contributions he made to Georgia's history. He was not in on the founding, nor did he fight the Spaniards or the Indians. He did not have the flamboyant personality of Oglethorpe, neither did he seek to be the center of everything in the colony nor to dominate its every important happening. He advocated no major new programs, nor was he an inspired leader of the masses. Instead he was a quiet man of considerable ability who worked hard at his job as governor of a rapidly growing colony. He did have a vision for Georgia: for the colony to grow and prosper. Aid to this growth and prosperity was Wright's greatest contribution, but it was not the sort of program to catch men's imagination nor to make a hero of its chief backer. After 1764 the excitement people remembered most about Wright's governorship was his opposition to the American Rights group in Georgia and to independence. Wright was thought of in his own day in a negative way as an enemy of Georgia's independence.

James Wright was born in London in 1716. The common misconception that he was born in South Carolina evidently came from his having moved there about 1730 with his father, chief justice of the colony. As a young man in Charleston, James Wright practiced law and held a number of minor positions in the courts. He attended Gray's Inn, one of the London law schools, in the early 1740s and was called to the bar. (Today we would say "passed the bar exam"). He became attorney general of South Carolina and held that position until he went to London in 1757 as the colony's agent there. He was in London in 1760 when he was appointed Lieutenant Governor of Georgia to relieve Governor Henry Ellis. Ellis returned to England and resigned his commission as governor in 1761. Wright was then appointed governor, a position he retained until it was abolished in 1782.

Wright a Conservative

James Wright was an eighteenth-century conservative who believed in a structural society of

classes, in the benefits of the British Empire to the colonies and in slow and orderly change. Wright lacked the charming personality of his predecessor Henry Ellis and suffered in the minds of Georgians then and since because of this. However, he soon became a competent governor who convinced most Georgians he had their welfare at heart.

Governor Wright arrived in Georgia at a good time for success in the colony. The growth begun about 1750 with the ending of the Trustees' program for early Georgia had been slowed by the fighting against the French which began with the French and Indian War in 1754. The French in present-day Alabama and the Spanish in St. Augustine were too close for comfort. The Spanish joined the French in the war against Britain in January 1762, but caused no trouble in the Georgia-Florida area before the peace treaty was signed in Paris February 10, 1763. The treaty ceded Florida and the French territory east of the Mississippi River to Britain. Hence Georgia lost her dangerous neighbors and was now in her best position ever to expand to the south and to the west.

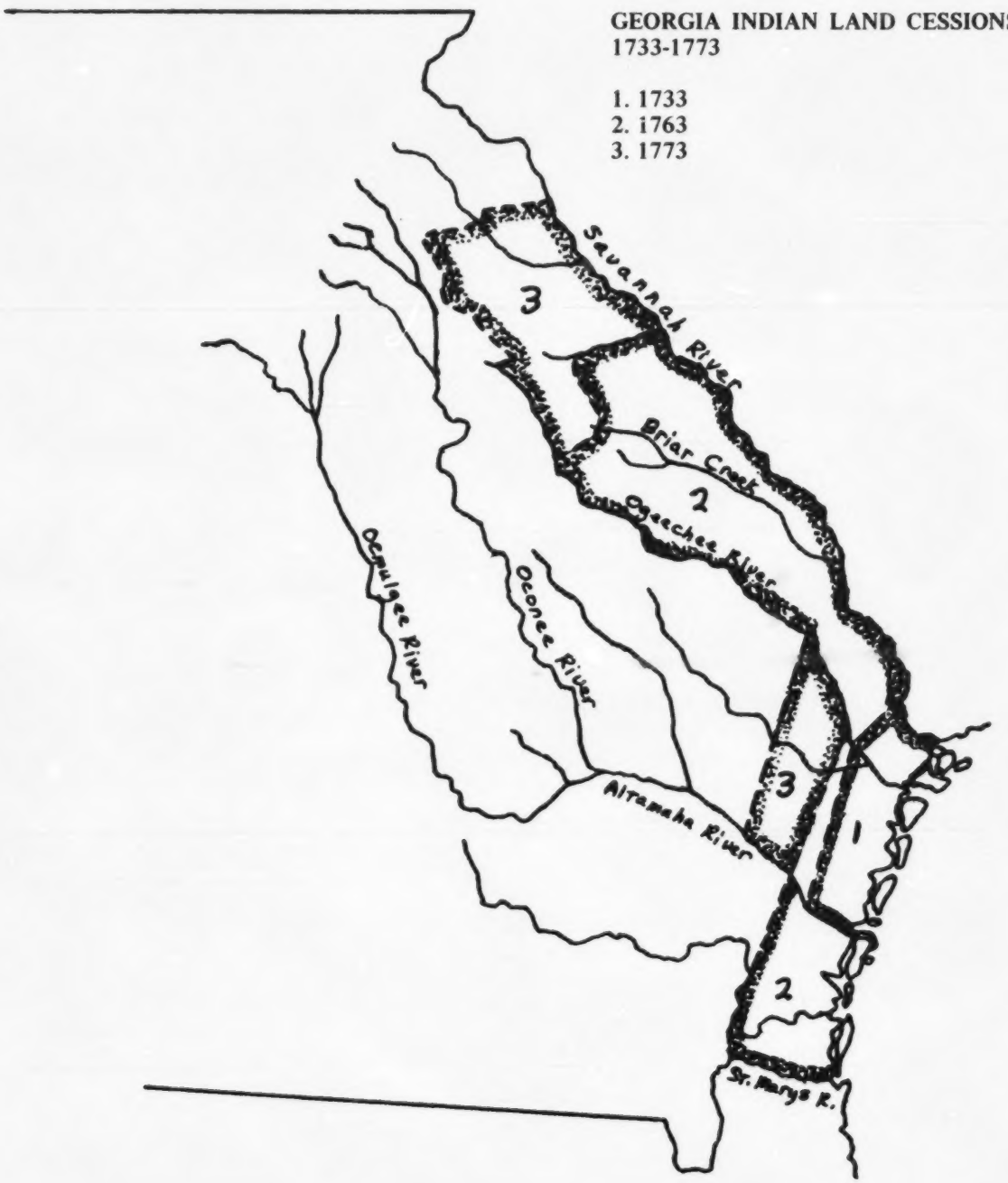
James Wright was certainly the governor who knew how to take advantage of this opportunity for growth. From his South Carolina years, he knew what was necessary for Georgia to succeed. There needed to be peace with the Indians and increased population to grow more agricultural products. To entice more settlers to Georgia, more land had to be ceded by the Indians. Securing more land and insuring Indian friendship at the same time was often difficult, so Wright had to be careful in land negotiations.

Indians Stay at Peace

John Stuart, Indian Superintendent for the southern colonies, was trusted by the Indians. Good Indian relations necessitated working with Stuart. The superintendent and the governor often had different viewpoints about what they wanted, but they generally worked together well. Both believed Indians and whites should live up to their treaty obligations and tried to see that both did. Wright and Stuart insisted whites not settle on land still owned by the Indians and tried to keep traders from cheating the Indians—the two main causes of frontier hostilities. Wright several times ordered whites to vacate land upon which they had settled before it was ceded by the Indians. After 1763 neither superintendent nor governor could control the number of Indian traders, as the Proclamation of 1763 said all who fulfilled the requirements and applied for a trading license must be issued one. This helped bring on Indian trouble, since the best way to keep Indians at peace was to prevent their getting too much trade goods. Although there were always frontier clashes between Indians and whites, with occasional murders, generally Wright and Stuart were successful and Indian relations were good on the Georgia frontier. The exit of the French and the Spanish from the southeast in 1763 aided relations between the English colonials and the Creeks, the Indians of most concern to Georgians.

There were two major Indian land cessions in Georgia during Wright's governorship in 1763 and 1773. The first came as a part of the general peace settlement between the English and the southern Indians. Wright had little to do with this cession, although he did attend the Congress at Augusta where the cession was made. This cession included land between the Savannah and Ogeechee rivers from just above Ebenezer to the Little River above Augusta and a strip of coastal land about thirty miles wide between the Altamaha and St. Marys rivers.

Wright was intimately connected with the second land cession in 1773. The idea of this cession originated in 1768 with traders who had sold the Creeks more goods than they could pay for and suggested a land cession in payment. Since most of the good land from the 1763 cession had been granted, Wright liked the idea. When he was in England on leave from 1771 to 1773, he secured approval to negotiate a cession. Back in Georgia, he and Super-



Based on U. B. Phillips' *Georgia and States Rights.*

intendent Stuart met with Creeks and Cherokees at Augusta and secured over 1.6 million acres between the Savannah and the Oconee-Ogeechee rivers north and west of the 1763 cession and about 500,000 acres between the Ogeechee and Altamaha rivers, just west of the small strip ceded in 1763. Wright and the Georgia Assembly wanted all the land between the Ogeechee to the east and Altamaha and Oconee on the west, but were not able to secure it in 1773. The two cessions of 1763 and 1773 greatly expanded the area in Georgia open to white settlement and allowed the population increase so earnestly desired by Wright.

After each land cession, the governor issued a proclamation setting forth the terms under which the land could be secured by settlers. After the 1773 cession, he made an extended tour of the newly acquired land to investigate soil fertility, timber and mineral resources, streams and mill sites and anything else which might aid in its settlement. Such information must have been helpful to prospective settlers who had not seen the area themselves.

New Settlers Encouraged

Governor Wright also worked closely with the Assembly to encourage new settlers to come to Georgia. The Scotch-Irish were coming to America in large numbers and frequently were too poor to afford transportation and initial settlement costs. A bill was introduced into the Assembly to pay the transportation costs for such people but was dropped because of objections by the British government. Yet Wright secured payment by the colony of expenses for some Scotch-Irish who left Ireland thinking the bill had been passed. Surveys and land granting fees were also paid by the government for some settlers who came from other colonies to settle in Georgia.

Besides aid to settlers and land for them to settle, Wright believed settlements should adjoin to aid in building roads to new settlements and defense against Indians. To carry out this idea Wright always insisted land be granted for actual use and not for speculation as was common in the eighteenth century. The governor was willing to grant people all they were entitled to under the headright system—one hundred acres for the head of the family and fifty acres for each other member, free or slave. Larger grants of several thousand acres each were made only upon orders from London. Wright objected strenuously when South Carolina made grants south of the Altamaha in 1763 before that territory was annexed to Georgia. His objections were based mainly on his fear of vacant land held for speculation in an area he hoped would be added to Georgia and which needed settlers for defense.

Wright gave other encouragement to the larger planters who were of increasing importance in Georgia during his governorship. He became one of the largest and wealthiest planters in the colony himself and showed his belief in the colony and its future by his personal investment. Almost as soon as Wright came to Georgia, he sold his South Carolina lands and began to buy Georgia lands. He assembled through purchase one or two plantations in the vicinity of Savannah. Beginning in 1766, he received annual grants of 2,000 to 3,000 acres, using his growing number of slaves for the headright entitlement. By 1775 he owned about 26,000 acres divided into eleven plantations, worked by some 525 slaves and bringing in an estimated income of £5,000 to £6,000 sterling a year. Wright always had the reputation of being an excellent planter and for owning good land. Investing all his personal fortune in Georgia gave Wright a different viewpoint from that of a royal governor who came to a colony only temporarily and who had little personal investment in its future success.

British Mercantilism Supported

While Wright was a planter, he did all he could to encourage other economic activities consistent with the prevailing mercantilistic ideas of Britain. He believed the colonies should produce food and raw

materials and export their surplus, importing most of their manufactured goods from Britain. Thus, Wright tried to increase agriculture, lumbering and naval stores production to which Georgia's natural resources lent themselves most easily. There had been little lumbering or naval stores production in the Trustee period because of the shortage of labor. Now with the increasing slave population, these endeavors could flourish. One reason given for settling Georgia was to produce silk, and the Trustees had emphasized it throughout their period. Silk production was always disappointing in Georgia, but more was produced in the 1760s than ever before. When in 1768 the British government suggested the discontinuance of the Parliamentary bounty so essential to silk production, Wright objected strenuously. He was sure the amount of silk raised in Georgia would decrease greatly, and he was proven correct after the bounty was discontinued.

Wright's interest in trade was shown by his desire to improve the port facilities at Savannah, but there was nothing he could do about the inadequate depth of the river and the shallows between Savannah and the sea. To aid development of the southern part of the colony, he created Sunbury as a port of entry in 1763. He also hoped to develop Brunswick and St. Marys as ports for the area south of the Altamaha, but population was insufficient for their beginning until after the Revolutionary War.

Governor Wright realized effective political leadership was necessary to Georgia's growth and prosperity, and he always tried to furnish such leadership. As has been pointed out, Wright was not one who could charm people into doing what he wanted, nor did he engage in political "deals" to get what he wanted. Naturally he used patronage (appointment to office) to a degree, as all political leaders must. Wright wanted to appeal to the people by being a competent and efficient governor interested in their welfare. In as small a colony as Georgia, where most business, social and political affairs centered in Savannah and where the governor could know personally most of the colony's leaders, his personal influence was easy to exercise. Thus, except for the prerevolutionary troubles, Wright was usually able to carry most influential Georgians along with his ideas as to what was best for the colony.

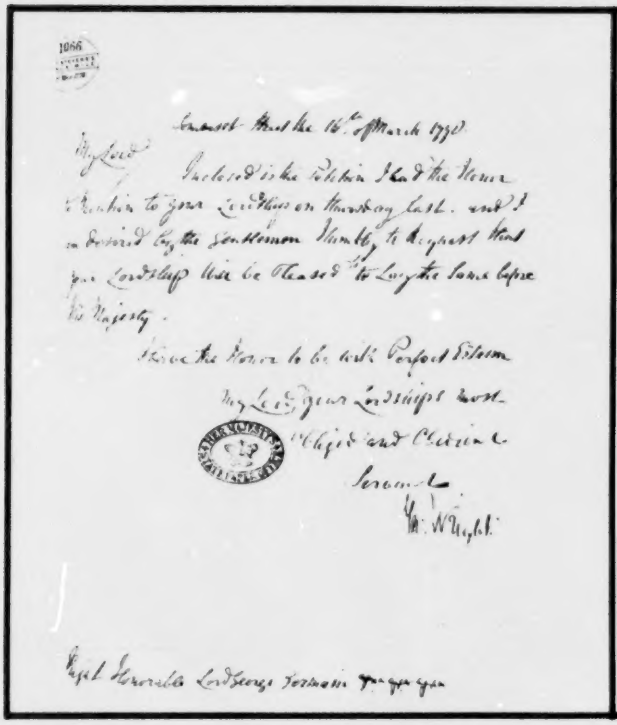
Wright Controls Council in Early Years

The governor always led his council and never had any trouble with it. The only important official with whom he differed was Chief Justice William Grover in 1761 and 1762, and both the council and Commons House backed Wright in this argument. Because of Grover's actions in office the council asked his removal. The Board of Trade investigated, and the king removed Grover in March of 1763. Leading almost all officials in the colony shows clearly that Wright was a good leader and administrator.

Wright usually made specific suggestions to the Assembly when it met. He often wrote or modified bills to meet objections from London. Being one of the few English-trained lawyers in the colony, he was in a better position to know what might receive approval in London than most assemblymen. The governor tried to influence assemblymen through private conversation and through leading councilors rather than through public arguments. He was essentially a negotiator except where orders from London or his ideas of the superiority of the British government were concerned. The governor signed most bills passed by the assembly. In cases of real argument between Wright and the Commons House, the Upper House, the council sitting as a legislative body, usually agreed with the governor.

Wright also worked to prevent troubles by taking action before problems reached an impasse. For instance, in 1768 when Regulator troubles in the Carolinas were caused by inadequate governmental operation in the back country, Wright and his council established a circuit court at Augusta for the benefit of the Georgia upcountry. In 1769-1770

From E. F. Stevens' Facsimiles of *Manuscripts in European Archives Relating to America, 1773-1783.*



Somerset Street the 16th of March 1778.

My Lord

Inclosed is the Petition I had the Honor to Mention to your Lordship on Thursday last. and I am desired by the gentlemen Humbly to Request that your Lordship Will be Pleased to Lay the Same before His Majesty.

I have the Honor to be with Perfect Esteem

My Lord, your Lordships Most

Obliged and Obedient

Servant

Ja. Wright

Right Honorable Lord George Germain &c &c &c

the Governor and the Commons House engaged in a heated argument over representation of the parishes south of the Altamaha created in 1765. Wright agreed that they should be represented in the Commons House, but he refused to issue writs of election because he had not received permission to do so from London despite his requests. Early in 1771 the desired instructions arrived and the matter was settled. The delay had created bad feelings between Wright and the Commons House. To prevent such a problem again, immediately after the 1773 Indian cession, Wright asked for and received permission from London to allow representation in the new area as soon as its population justified it.

Wright Competent, but Proprietary

It should now be clear that James Wright was a competent governor who was truly concerned about the welfare and development of Georgia. He led his government and colony with considerable success. He belonged to Georgia fully and came to believe the colony was his to guide and show to London at its best advantage. Perhaps Wright became too possessive in his feelings about Georgia and took the growing differences of opinion with the colonists as a personal affront. Most colonists respected the Governor and understood what he was doing for Georgia. Much of Georgia's advancement during his governorship was tied to and helped by his actions. This was Wright's greatest success as governor, and, ironically, his greatest contribution to Georgia's participation in the developing revolt.

Besides aiding Georgia's growth between 1764 and 1775, Wright also sought to keep ahead of the developing "American Rights" (or Revolutionary) movement and keep Georgians loyal to Britain. As

the spirit of revolt spread in America, Wright often thought British actions ill-advised. This was particularly true because officials in London often failed to consider American viewpoints. Wright was an American who understood the colonials. Hoping to prevent trouble he sometimes sent advice to London which was usually ignored except for that on specific Georgia problems.

New Policies Foment Revolt

The "New Colonial Policy" which brought an American rebellion began with the end of the French and Indian War in 1763. This policy consisted of Parliamentary laws to tax or control the colonies. The first act was the Sugar Act of 1764, a general tariff act. When the Georgia Assembly objected to the economic effect of this act and the proposed Stamp Act, the governor took no action. To him, this was an orderly and respectful protest by a legal body. But when the assemblymen requested him to call a special session to consider sending delegates to the Stamp Act Congress, Wright refused. Unified intercolonial protest was too much for him.

As November 1, 1765, the date the Stamp Act was to go into effect, approached, the "Sons of Liberty" organized in Savannah as in other colonies and made it clear that the sale of stamps would be opposed. Although Georgia had not been represented at the Stamp Act Congress in New York, the arrival of its proceedings in Savannah in November aroused considerable excitement. The Commons House of Assembly on December 14 adopted and dispatched to the King, Lords and Commons the petitions of the Stamp Act Congress. Although the Upper House had not been consulted on this, the governor made no effort to stop what he considered a legal and regular protest.

On November 1 there were no stamps, stamp distributor, nor even a copy of the Stamp Act in Georgia. The governor and council stopped land grants but allowed other transactions requiring stamps to continue. Wright undoubtedly approved this action as the only logical one under the circumstances. The stamps arrived December 5 but with no stamp distributor. Soon the Stamp Act was declared fully in force in Georgia. On January 2, 1766, a mob approached the governor's gate to inquire what he intended to do about the Stamp Act. He sent them away without an answer. Then, hearing that 200 Liberty Boys were gathering to destroy the stamps, Wright hastily collected about fifty guards and moved the stamps to a safer place. There was considerable excitement for the next several days, and Wright said that he did not have his clothes off for four days because he feared trouble. During this period George Angus, the stamp distributor, arrived.

Wright sent a guard for Angus, had him brought to the governor's house, and protected him for several days while he sold stamps for about sixty vessels in the harbor awaiting clearance. After this sale of stamps—the only stamps sold in any of the colonies which later rebelled—increased objections from Georgians resulted in the end of sales and the departure of the distributor. In early February Wright was glad of a chance to send the stamps out of the colony as it was obvious that no more could be sold.

Stamp Act Enforced

Wright's actions about the Stamp Act showed a good bit about the kind of person he was and the way he outmaneuvered his opponents. Even though he probably thought the Stamp Act unwise, once it was the law he did all he could to enforce it. He could have allowed himself to be intimidated by the mob, or he could have allowed the distributor to resign and business to be conducted without stamps. Both of these happened in other colonies. Instead he enforced the act against all objections and at considerable personal danger to himself.

Throughout the troubles he had fought to keep the initiative in his own hands and to prevent his enemies from getting ahead of him. In this he had

achieved considerable success. The good will he had built up since his arrival in Georgia paid off. Georgia was small and weak and had no well organized opposition, but neither did Wright have any troops to uphold his authority. There can be little doubt Wright carried out the Stamp Act through force of character and a determination to do his duty to King and to Parliament. Many other governors made no such attempt to enforce the unpopular act.

Once the troubles were over in 1766, the governor set out to try to prevent any such actions in the future. He said he had considerable success in convincing influential colonists of the error of mob action and of their duty to help prevent it in the future. But Wright made no effort to appeal to the masses of the people, for he was incapable of such popular leadership.

Courtesy, University of Georgia Library

Mob Pressure Posed Threat

Regardless of how unwise Wright considered the Stamp Act, he thought its repeal under mob pressure worse. To him, repeal would undermine the authority of the British government, demonstrate to the colonists the success of their tactics and end any future hope for controlling the colonies. It might well be fatal to the British Empire.

On the other hand, by his action during the Stamp Act crisis, Wright had created more enemies for himself in Georgia than ever before. Henceforth there would be a "Liberty Party" in Georgia which would increasingly object to actions of the British government and of Wright as its representative. Wright had won a victory, but a costly one. His honeymoon as Governor was over and would never return. He would be able to do many things in Georgia in the next decade, but he would never have the wholehearted backing by the people he had enjoyed before the Stamp Act.

Uneasy Truce Short-lived

Wright, the Assembly and most Georgians were glad there had been no really serious trouble in Georgia over the Stamp Act, but peace did not last. In 1767 Parliament passed the Townshend Revenue Acts, and the colonial opposition ended the short truce which repeal of the Stamp Act had brought. Action came in other colonies before it did in Georgia. By the fall of 1768 the Massachusetts House of Representatives had sent a circular objecting to the Townshend Acts to other colonial lower houses. When the Georgia Assembly met in November, Wright informed it that the King did not approve of the Massachusetts circular and had instructed him to dissolve the assembly if it took up this circular.

The Commons House considered its most pressing business and on December 24 voted that the Massachusetts circular was a proper exercise of the right of petition. It adopted a "dutiful and loyal" address

to the King saying so. Wright immediately dissolved the assembly as he had said that he would. By such actions he ignored the right of loyal subjects to petition the Crown, a sacred right to all Englishmen. Wright really needed to do nothing more to fight opposition to the Townshend Acts in Georgia. In September 1769, a citizens' meeting in Savannah adopted an agreement to import nothing from Britain until the duties imposed by the Townshend Act on imports were repealed. This agreement was never offered for signatures of Georgians so never went into effect.

Critic Denied Office

After the Townshend Act controversies, there was no further trouble in Georgia until April 1771. Then the Commons House unanimously elected as speaker Noble Wimberly Jones, its former speaker who had become one of the leading opponents of British actions. The governor, exercising a power never used before in Georgia, disapproved Jones' selection. The Commons House then elected Archibald Bulloch, who was just as anti-British as Jones, and resolved the governor's refusal to accept a speaker elected by a unanimous vote was a "high breach of the privilege of the house, and tends to subvert the most valuable rights and liberties of the people."

Wright and his council agreed that such a denial of royal authority made it impossible to do business with this assembly. After fruitless private attempts to get the resolution rescinded, Wright dissolved the assembly before it transacted any business. His actions were approved in England, and instructions were issued to disapprove whoever was chosen as speaker by the next Assembly. By the time of the next meeting, Wright was in England; so the argument was continued with James Habersham, the acting governor.

On Leave in England

Wright left Georgia for leave in England in July of 1771. While in England he saw leading officials and carried out Georgia business, including securing approval for the 1773 Indian land cession which he and Superintendent Stuart negotiated after his return to Georgia. In December 1772, George III made Wright a baronet, the lowest order of English nobility, as a reward for his work in Georgia.

For almost a year and a half after Wright's return to Georgia in February 1773, there was no special trouble between Britain and the colonies, certainly not in Georgia. Early in 1774 Parliament passed the Intolerable Acts to punish Boston and Massachusetts for the Boston Tea Party of the previous December. Colonial protests against these acts began soon and reached Savannah in July. Two protest meetings were held in July and August. Someone circulated petitions in the colony denouncing both meetings and their resolutions, obviously with the approval if not with the support of the Governor. The August meetings debated selecting delegates to the First Continental Congress to meet in Philadelphia in September, but took no action. This time, unlike the Stamp Act Congress, Wright could not be blamed for Georgia's not being represented.

Georgia moved closer to the other colonies in early 1775. On January 17 and 18 the Assembly and the First Georgia Provincial Congress met in Savannah. The Congress adopted the Continental Association of the First Continental Congress, elected delegates to the Second Continental Congress and did other things to place Georgia in line with the actions of the other revolutionary colonies. Since this Georgia Congress represented only five of the twelve parishes, it did not feel that it could speak for the entire colony. It hoped the assembly, or at least the Commons House, would approve its actions and make them official. To prevent this, Wright adjourned the assembly on February 10.

On the night of June 2 local people spiked the cannon on the battery in Savannah and threw them

down the bluff to prevent their being used in celebration of the King's birthday June 4. Not to be outdone by his opponents, Wright had some of the cannon recovered, drilled out and fired for the birthday. He also gave his usual celebration for the public officials. His opponents, now calling themselves Whigs, held a celebration the next day at the newly erected liberty pole and gave an elegant dinner at Tondee's Tavern.

Provincial Congresses Gain

In the summer of 1775 two more provincial congresses met and took over more of Georgia's actual government. By the end of the summer the Provincial Congress was the government, and Wright and his council were in a position to object to Whig activities but they could prevent none of them. Wright remained in Savannah until February 1776, but he realized he had no power left during the last six months. To a person of Wright's temperament and beliefs, this situation was very difficult. When he left for England in February he realized revolution had come to Georgia, despite all that he had done to prevent it.

Wright's actions and attitudes affected the climate of revolution in Georgia in several ways. On the side of delaying rebellion, Wright had considerable success before 1775. Georgians were usually later in their rebel actions than colonists elsewhere, and these actions were modeled on and influenced by those in other colonies. This delay may be attributed to Governor Wright's actions and to Georgia's smallness, youth and exposed frontier.

Wright refused to give in to colonial objectors and did what he could to uphold royal authority. He also strove to keep ahead of the objectors and to convince Georgians they were better off as a part of the British Empire. His personal success and that of many Georgians convinced him similar results were possible for other colonists. Rebellion, as he saw it, could only harm Georgia and her inhabitants. His confidence in the British political system reinforced his belief that there could be no liberty except under law.

It is impossible to know how many of those who hesitated or refused to rebel did so because of Wright's leadership. The Governor's ability to influence Georgians undoubtedly stemmed from the regard for him built up throughout his governorship.

Growth Helps Produce Revolt

On the other side, the governor's aid to the growth of the population and economy in Georgia helped produce the self-confidence and maturity necessary before Georgia could revolt. Similarly the arguments of the last ten years between the Governor and the Commons House helped produce the political maturity and feeling of independent action also necessary for rebellion.

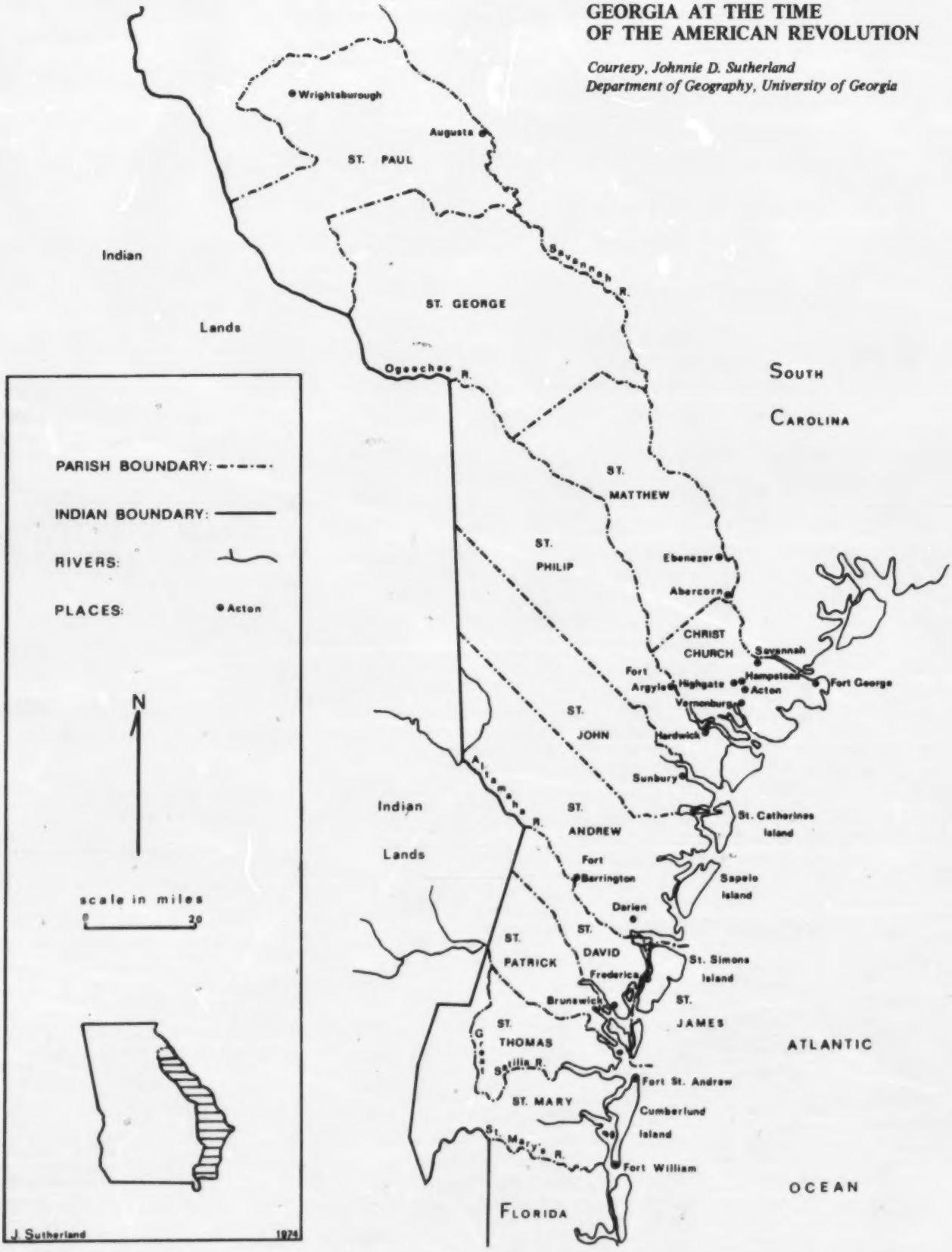
Finally, Wright's insistence always living up to the letter of his instructions from London and refusal to negotiate on American rights made enemies for him and hurt his cause. In considering his continuing refusal to give in to colonial opposition, two explanations are possible. The first is that he did not understand his opponents and believed any compromise would aid the plans of the colonial opposition. The other possibility is Wright understood what the results of his actions would be, but his nature made it impossible for him to give in for the sake of expediency. He would obey his orders from London regardless of the consequences because that was his duty and the right thing to do. From what is known of Wright's abilities, his knowledge of colonials and his set of mind the latter possibility is probably the correct one. It is impossible from the records to know for sure.

Wright Calls for More Soldiers

Wright had revealed his viewpoints and abilities as governor between 1760 and 1776. It is extremely doubtful anyone in the Governor's position could have prevented the rebellion which came to Georgia

GEORGIA AT THE TIME OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Courtesy, Johnnie D. Sutherland
Department of Geography, University of Georgia



in 1775 and 1776. Yet Wright's attitude had been that most Georgians were naturally loyal to the king. Back in England, Wright continued to express this viewpoint as a part of his argument for the recapture of Georgia. Once the "friends of government" were given some military backing, he was sure they could predominate over the rebels. Finally in December 1778, Savannah was captured by British troops and remained in their hands until July 1782.

From the very beginning of the planning for the recapture of Georgia, the British government intended to use the colony as an illustration of the blessings of restored colonial status to convince other colonials to return to their loyalty to the king. Early in March 1779, civilian government was restored when Lieutenant Colonel James Mark Prevost was appointed Lieutenant Governor for Georgia. Governor Wright, Lieutenant Governor John Graham and Chief Justice Anthony Stokes returned to Savannah from England in July 1779, and resumed their duties. For the next three years Georgia would be divided between colonial and state governments, with the colonial headquarters always in Savannah.

Once he was back in Savannah, Wright repeatedly requested additional troops to recapture all of Georgia—contrary to his having argued in England that most Georgians were loyal to the King. The governor was sure many who had taken the oath of loyalty to the king had done so because they felt it was hopeless to resist further and not because they loved the king and Britain. Hence Wright delayed calling an assembly election, fearing people not loyal to the King might control the Commons House and cause trouble.

Once the initial conquest was over, the territory under British control stabilized to include Savannah and the surrounding area for twenty-five to forty miles. The rest of Georgia was under the control of the state government located in Augusta. Wright worked hard in restoring civilian government, and in many respects seemed the able and efficient governor of the earlier period. The arrival of a French fleet under Count Charles-Henri d'Estaing in September 1779, brought more action than Georgia had seen since the return of the British. The French and Americans, with about twice as many troops as the British, had a good chance to capture Savannah. Wright immediately ordered in 400-500 slaves to work on fortifications of Savannah and opposed any suggestion the city be surrendered. In the end the French-American attack failed, and the French sailed away about two months after their arrival.

Wright Hopes For Recapture

Now the British were free to carry out their plans to capture Charleston, which fell May 12, 1780, under General Benjamin Lincoln and his entire American army. About the same time militia and other British forces occupied Augusta, and Wright hoped that the entire province would now submit. While the colonial government gradually acquired more territory for the next year, never again were the majority of Georgians aligned with the King. This was especially true for many in the upcountry Indian cession of 1773. One reason for this failure was that the British troops taken out of Georgia for use against Charleston in 1780 were never returned, despite the continual requests of Wright.

Wright did call an assembly election in April 1780, and its first meeting took place in May. After 1780 Wright discovered that he could not convince the Assembly to stay in session long enough to do what was needed. Otherwise the governor was the real leader of the government and generally got approval in London for his suggestions in civilian affairs.

It was the military which gave the governor his greatest troubles. The military commanders could never see Georgia's defense as Wright did, nor would they send enough troops to recapture all the province from the rebels. Wright was sure the

commanders were shortsighted or lacked sufficient interest in the welfare of the Empire. One British commander said of Wright and his council, that they were "the most absurd of all people." Wright believed the military commanders objected to him because he headed a civilian government which they could not control. He never saw the military picture from the overall viewpoint, and he was sure 1,000 or more troops could be spared to capture the rest of Georgia. But the troops never came.

Wright Defeated

American revival began in the summer of 1781 with the capture of Augusta in June and the evacuation of both the Georgia and South Carolina backcountry by the British in June and early July. More American troops were available after the victory at Yorktown in October 1781, and General Anthony Wayne was sent to Georgia as commander. While Wayne did not have enough troops to drive the British out, he did assume an offensive which worried the British. Wright began to show the frustration of a person caught in a trap who knew there was nothing he could do about it. He lost his old efficiency and became a chronic complainer. He knew he could do little to improve the situation, yet he felt compelled to register his complaints with the military in America and the government in London.

When the British commander-in-chief in America ordered the evacuation of Savannah and Georgia in May 1782, Wright and his Council objected strenuously and again reported only "a few more troops" were all that were needed to make Georgia secure for the British. Naturally no one listened by now. Wright left Georgia, the scene of his greatest successes and failures, with the British troops July 10, 1782, and went "home" to an England that could not understand the importance of a poor and weak frontier colony. In the three years left to him, Wright worked to get recognition and financial compensation for his losses and those of other Loyalists. He certainly did not think the pension of £500 a year granted to him was adequate to compensate for his losses in Georgia nor to reward his services there. He died November 20, 1785, at Westminster and was buried in the north cloister of the Abbey.

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Teacher's Guide

Thelma D. Davis
Frances J. McKibben

Teachers
Ridgeview High School
Fulton County Schools

Focus

The purpose of this unit is to recognize a man in the context of his time.

The student has an opportunity to read about Governor James Wright and to recognize how a man influences and is influenced by the events of his time.

General Objectives

1. Students should be able to assess Wright's contributions to Georgia's colonial development.
2. Students should be able to identify two Revolutionary groups and explain their influence in the Georgia colony.
3. Students should be able to develop hypotheses on the growth of the Revolutionary spirit in the Georgia colony under Governor James Wright.
4. Students should be able to recognize the events which caused Georgia's final break with England.
5. The students should be able to trace the domestic growth of the colony under James Wright, for example: increased land holdings.

Suggested Schedule

The unit should take approximately one week. A list of suggested topics follows.

I. Wright, the Man and the Politician

   A. What type of man was James Wright?
   B. How was Wright the politician different from Wright the man?

II. Domestic growth of Georgia

   A. Indian land cession
   B. Influence of increased population on domestic growth

III. The development of the Revolutionary spirit

   A. Boycotts, etc.
   B. Commons House opposition to Wright's policies

IV. Revolutionary Groups (e.g., Sons of Liberty)

V. Events which led to the final break with Great Britain (e.g., Stamp Act)

Activities

Instruct students to develop a time-line by identifying important events and dates in Georgia. Included is a time-line which can be used as a guide for this activity. The teacher might supply the dates and ask the students to fill in the events, or vice-versa.

Students should investigate the theory of mercantilism and construct a simple diagram of trade routes.

Included is a crossword puzzle which can be used as a study guide or as a review of the unit.

Assign three groups of students to write scripts for a role-playing situation on one of the following topics.

Wright confronts the Commons House

John Stuart and Governor Wright negotiate an Indian land cession

A family discusses a move to the colony of Georgia

Students should then present their plays to the entire class.

Assign an activity sheet where students list the pros and cons of the Revolutionary movement in the Georgia Colony

Pros	Why?	Cons	Why?

Suggested Discussion Questions

1. What were the major aspects of Wright's land policies? If you had been a Georgia settler, which parts of the policies would you have liked and which parts of the policies would you have opposed?

2. What was the "headright" system? What is your opinion of such a system?

3. Discuss the theory of mercantilism. Evaluate the importance of the Georgia colony as a supplier of raw materials.

4. Discuss Wright's relationship with the other leaders of the Georgia colony. What was the impact of this relationship on the development of the Revolutionary spirit in Georgia?

5. Evaluate Wright's relationship with the Georgia Assembly. Where do you feel he made mistakes? What events do you feel Wright handled effectively?

6. What is your opinion of Wright's attempts to enforce the Parliamentary acts? How would you have handled them?

7. Discuss the major events which caused Georgia to move closer to the views of the other colonies.

8. Discuss whether the Revolutionary spirit in Georgia was late in developing because of Wright's influence or because Georgia was the most recently settled colony.

Timeline: Governor James Wright in Georgia

1716 James Wright is born in London, England.

1730 The approximate date Wright's family moves to South Carolina where his father is chief justice of the colony.

1733 Oglethorpe arrives at Savannah with a group of settlers.

1754 Georgia becomes a royal province.
The French and Indian War begins.

1757 Wright leaves for London to act as agent for South Carolina. He had previously served as attorney general of South Carolina.

1760 Wright is appointed lieutenant governor of Georgia to replace Henry Ellis.

1761 Wright is appointed governor of the Georgia Colony.

1763 Southern Indians cede land between Savannah and Ogeechee Rivers and a strip of coastal land between Altamaha and St. Marys Rivers.
Proclamation of 1763, The Treaty of Paris

1764 Parliament passes the Sugar Act.

1765 The Sons of Liberty organized to oppose implementation of the Stamp Act.

1767 Parliament passes the Townshend Revenue Acts.

1769 Savannah agrees to boycott British goods.

1771 Wright dissolves the Georgia Assembly because of conflicts over selection of a Commons House speaker.

1771-1773 Wright is on leave in England. In 1772 Wright is made a baronet by George III.

1774 Parliament passes the Intolerable Acts.

1775 Wright loses control of the Georgia government to the Whig Provincial Congress.

1776 Wright leaves the Georgia Colony to return to England.

1785 Wright dies and is buried in Westminster Abbey.

Vocabulary

Headright

Impasse

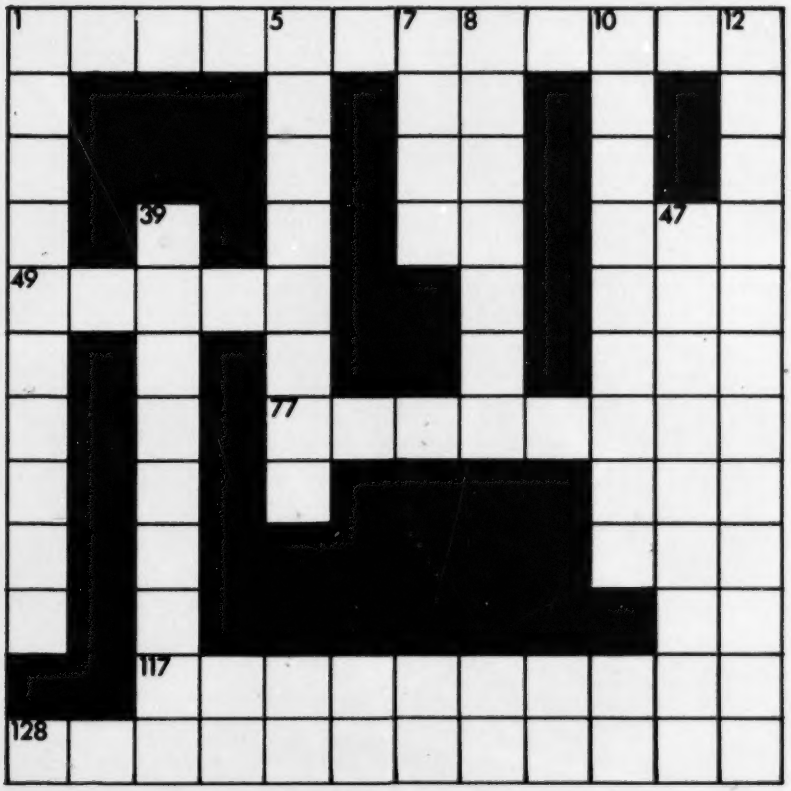
Commons House

Regulator

Spiked

Battery

Objectors



ACROSS

1. Governor of Georgia 1760-1782
49. One of the reasons for settling Georgia
77. An Indian tribe in Georgia
117. Group of men in the Carolinas who helped control government in the back country
128. Part of legislative body of colony

DOWN

1. Indian superintendent for Southern colonies
5. Law passed by British Parliament
7. A product grown in Georgia
8. A deadlock
10. A system which allowed 100 acres of land for head of a family
12. Wanted to destroy the stamps
39. Many settlers in Georgia were these people
47. People who objected to collection of stamp tax

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